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ABSTRACT

This guide was developed to help teachers prepare adult students for the essay writing section of the General Educational Development (GED) tests. It informs teachers of what is expected of students on the essay section of the GED examination, and leads them through the writing process in preparation for teaching students how to write an essay. Topics covered in the guide include the following: the GED essay; the assignment; the materials for teaching writing; factors in teaching writing; on the nature of teaching writing; stages of the writing process; strategies; worrying; committing; improving writing; scoring the GED essay; and using the videotape that accompanies the manual. An appendix provides sample topics for GED essays. A list of 75 references is included. (KC)

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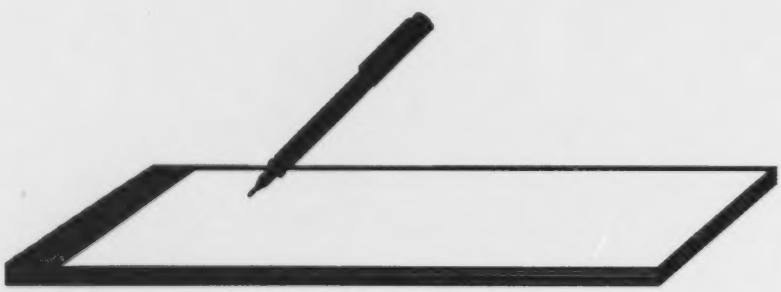
GED Essay Writing: *Writing With Spirit*

A Notebook for GED Writing Instructors



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GED ESSAY WRITING: WRITING WITH SPIRIT

A Notebook for GED Writing Instructors

by

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1989

The Center for Community Education

Montana State University

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THE GED ESSAY

In 1988 a new writing component was added to the GED exam. In order to pass the GED, students are now required to write an essay. The rationale for adding this component is expressed by the GED test developers when they state that "no one should receive credit for high school equivalency without being asked to demonstrate writing ability directly as well as indirectly" (GED Testing Service, 1985, p. 8).

The Writing Skills section of the GED exam is now comprised of two parts. The first part indirectly checks knowledge of English language conventions through a multiple choice format. The second part directly checks writing ability by asking students to write an essay in 45 minutes on an assigned topic using approximately 200 words. The scores of both parts are then combined and reported as a single, final score.

Certainly this new requirement has changed the way we teach English in GED classes. Where grammar, usage, and punctuation once held center stage, writing now plays a large part. The traditional focus on "product" on a red-ink correction of errors--has yielded to a focus on "process" on continually refining communication through the generation and revision of drafts. This notebook and the accompanying video were developed in response to this change.

Further Reading:

Swartz, R., & Whitney, D. R. (1987). The new GED writing skills test: Some clarifications and suggestions. *Lifelong Learning, 11*(2), 4-5,11.

THE ASSIGNMENT

Like all writing assignments, the GED essay can be thought of in terms of certain characteristics, for example, audience, purpose, message, genre, and style.

Audience

Question: Who will read the piece?
Answer: Scorers for the GED essay

Purpose

Question: Why write the piece?
Answer: To pass the GED exam.

Message

Question: What information is conveyed?
Answer: A position on a given topic.

Genre

Question: What is the "mode of discourse"?
Answer: Short essay, 3-5 paragraphs.

Style

Question: Is the writing formal or informal, personal or impersonal, etc.?
Answer: Formal.

Further Reading:

Slevin, J. F. (1983). Interpreting and composing: The many resources of kind. In J. N. Hays, P. A. Roth, J. R. Ramsey & R. D. Foulke (Eds.), *The writer's mind: Writing as a mode of thinking*(pp. 197-210). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

THE MATERIALS

The Notebook

This notebook is designed to explain the writing process in relation to composing the genre of the essay. It is primarily for GED instructors' use and can be used in conjunction with the video "GED Essay Writing: Writing with Spirit." The information herein pertains to the legitimate GED student, that is, the student with the basic skills to be successful at intermediate level academic work. In this text, we will refer to the student as the "inexperienced writer," someone with minimum competency to convey ideas in writing. The suggested strategies and explanations do not apply to the ABE student who is still building the basic skills of reading and computation. The sections are designed to provide current views on writing as a process. The specific strategies target the GED student who will have a stated topic on which to write and a limited amount of time in which to do it.

This is not the best context for encouraging comfortable and competent writing, but it is the test context under which students will have to perform. Although we, the authors, do not like to advocate "teaching to the test," we do feel strongly that not providing test-like conditions for practice will be detrimental to students' performance on the GED.

The goals for these materials are twofold. The short range goal is to provide enough theoretical foundation so that you, the instructors, feel knowledgeable about the writing process itself and to supply you with practical applications that will promote competency on the GED essay requirement. The long range goal is to pique your interest enough that you will pursue at least some of the materials from our bibliography. Excellent materials have been published recently which address the topic of writing instruction. This notebook is merely the tip-of-the-tip-of the iceberg. We encourage you to investigate further. To that end, we have included a

short list of "must have" materials that we recommend if you have a limited budget, many catalogues, and a desire to start in the most effective way.

The Video

The notebook and the video can be used independently of each other, although each will be enhanced by the use of the other. The video presentation is the visualization of the writing process from the perspective of the GED student her/himself.

We encourage you to use the video with the students themselves. It can be used interactively by manually stopping the tape at appropriate places to reinforce the phases of writing and what happens in each. The worrying phase, for instance, can be examined closely by looking at the ways in which the student writer approaches the idea generating stage.

The point of the video is that writing *is* a process and not necessarily a step-by-step, linear activity. Good writers do not all write in the same way or by using the same formula. Inexperienced writers need to know that the way they approach the writing task has validity for them if it works. The difficulty in a visual medium such as video is the portrayal of a process as a whole. Consequently, this presentation is not a workshop of lecture lesson but is the global picture of a student writing for the GED itself.

Teaching Writing

Although writing is seldom characterized as easy, neither does it have to be a threatening and anxious task. All it takes is practice and lots of it in a nonjudgmental atmosphere. Resist the temptation to focus criticism on only the grammatical aspects. Rather, focus on the ideas and how they are conveyed. Avoid that red pen

mentality. Instead, conference orally in a shared dialogue about the written piece.

Teaching the writing process should be different than a "skill and drill" activity; workbook exercises have limited effectiveness. Formal grammar teaching is most appropriate for taking a formal grammar test and has little bearing on writing except in the editing task. Writing takes time for thinking about and doing. Model as often as possible your own writing behaviors. If you feel uncomfortable as a writer, that may be the best lesson to share with your students. Page 6 presents an overview of some salient factors in teaching writing that can be applied to any kind of writing program.

Teaching essay writing amounts to one very narrow aspect of writing instruction. Teaching GED essay writing is narrower still. These materials, this notebook and video, are geared very specifically toward teaching GED essay writing. While we don't apologize for our narrow focus, we do want to emphasize that we believe that a comprehensive writing program should not consist solely of essay writing.

Ideally, your writing program should teach writing in all of its communicative aspects. We hope that you will introduce your students to different ways of using and thinking about writing. Realistically, though, you may be teaching students whose immediate goal for writing is simply to pass the GED. Given that reality, we offer these materials, in the hope that they will help your students achieve their goal.

FACTORS IN TEACHING WRITING

Writing anxiety	"What do I have to say? Nothing! How do I spell this word? I don't know! How do organize my ideas? Who knows!" We have all felt such anxieties about writing. Your GED students, however, may feel them more acutely. They, after all, have probably not had success with writing in the past. Talking about writing anxiety can help to reduce it.
Classroom climate	An atmosphere of trust is essential. Writing is risky business, and few of us will risk ourselves in an unfriendly climate. Assure your students that their efforts are valued--certainly by you, hopefully by other students in the class.
Modeling	Students need to see writers at work. They need to see how writers shape ideas into words, sentences, paragraphs. They need to see that part of writing is the act of wrestling an unwieldy idea into text. As a writing instructor, you are the ideal person to model the writing process for your students.
Concern for correctness	An early emphasis on correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar hinders the writing process. Can you imagine speaking using only the words you know how to spell, in sentences you know how to punctuate? Of course not. Neither should mechanics get in the way of written communication. Correctness is important, but not initially. If correctness is stressed too soon, writers may focus on "getting it right" rather than on communicating their message. Leave corrections for the editing stage.

ON THE NATURE OF WRITING

Let us state the obvious: writing is complex. Current understanding of writing is highly tentative, really just a best guess. As of yet, no one can peer into the writer's mind to gauge how it is that vague ideas become coherent text. What, then, can we say about an act as impenetrable as writing?

- Writing is a process.
- The writing process is recursive.
- Writing is idiosyncratic.
- Reading is part of writing.

Writing Is a Process

Is there a perfect metaphor for the writing process? Certainly researchers have sought one. The writing process has been compared to a pot of stew (Gorrell, 1983), into which are poured both secret and not-so-secret ingredients; to a highway (Walling, 1983), along which the writer "drives" between stimulus and text; and even to the double helix of DNA (Berthoff, 1981), with "naming, opposing, and defining" as alternating sections of the helix. The complexity of the writing process is revealed in the diversity of these metaphors. As different as these metaphors are, all accurately describe at least part of the writing process. Given this complexity, how do we get a better handle on the writing process?

Rose (1983, p. 210) states that "Because anything complex is best explained in print by reducing complexity, what often happens is that a process is reduced to a list, a series of steps." He's right: in pursuit of clarity, most discussions of the writing process, including this one, oversimplify the act of writing. Thus, our "Stages of

the Writing Process" (p. 9), by their very format, imply discrete steps in the writing process. Don't be fooled. As Berthoff (1981) states, "Any process has phases and so does composing, but they interact with one another in a complex way" (p. 20). The stages of the writing process overlap, flowing into and out of one another. Bear in mind that distinctions between one stage of the writing process and another are highly arbitrary.

Having said that, let us state that writing seems to proceed via certain discernable stages. In this notebook, we use the terms "worrying, committing, and improving." In other words, as writers, we all worry about writing tasks, we commit our ideas to text, and we try to improve what we have written. These stages are also referred to as "prewriting, writing, rewriting" (Smith, 1982) and "planning, translating, reviewing" (Flower and Hayes, 1981). Though the terms differ, all describe similar events.

Further Readings:

Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication, 32*(4), December, 365-387.

Hammond, E. R. (1983). Learning an efficient writing process. In E. R. Hammond (Ed.), *Teaching writing*(pp. 55-68). New York: McGraw-Hill.

STAGES OF THE WRITING PROCESS

Worrying	Thinking about piece Generating ideas Exploring approaches, point of view Talking about ideas Considering audience Searching for message Planning text structure Arranging and rearranging ideas Ordering topics, subtopics Jotting down phrases, sentences
Committing	Selecting topics and subtopics Organizing ideas Translating ideas into text Structuring piece Drafting
Improving	Switching from writer to reader Reading Evaluating, critiquing Correcting spelling, punctuation, usage Inserting Deleting Substituting Consolidating Rearranging Restructuring

The Recursive Nature of Writing

Writing is not a neat, sequential, linear act. Writers do not start at stage one, move to stage two, and end with stage three. We do not worry first, commit in the middle, and improve last. Instead, writing tends to be circuitous: circling, backtracking, meandering. In other words, the writing process is recursive.

What does it mean to say that writing is "recursive?" In her description of recursion, Perl (1988) states that

> *throughout the process of writing, writers return to substrands of the overall process, or subroutines (short successions of steps that yield results on which the writer draws in taking the next set of steps); writers use these to keep the process moving forward. In other words, recursiveness in writing implies that there is a forward-moving action that exists by virtue of a backward-moving action (p. 114).*

For instance, we may generate text for a while, then stop to reread what we have written. Or we may maintain a focus on our topic by periodically stopping and talking to ourselves, saying something like "Now, what am I trying to say here? I'm trying to explain . . ."

Such "subroutines" illustrate the recursive nature of writing: we stop whatever part of the process we are doing, circling back to some other part(s). As Gorrell (1983) states, "All three of these parts [prewriting, writing, revision] of the process occur over and over before anything gets finished" (p. 274).

Further Readings:

Gorrell, R. M. (1983). How to make Mulligan stew: Process and product again. *College Composition and Communication, 34*(3), October, 272-277.

Perl, S. (1988). Understanding composing. In G. Tate & E. P. J. Corbett (Eds.), *The writing teacher's sourcebook*(pp. 113-118). New York: Oxford University Press.

The Idiosyncratic Nature of Writing

Each writer approaches writing in an individualized way. Both in terms of time and sequence, we each approach the stages of the writing process in our own unique way. For instance, some writers invest a great amount of time in the worrying stage. Before they ever take pen in hand, before they write a word, they have considered *x* number of approaches to the writing task. They may mull over many possibilities, focusing in their minds before they focus on paper. Other writers commit to paper early in the process. These writers may put on paper everything that comes into their minds, leaving the selecting, sifting, and sorting of ideas for later. Still others may spend the bulk of their time improving what they have written. They may generate text without great forethought, then hone their text through revision after revision, draft after draft.

The sequence in which writers move through the writing process is also highly individualized. One writer may start by writing complete sentences as they occur, while another may start by arranging and rearranging key words and phrases. Further, different parts of the process "recur" for different writers. One writer may continually return to generating ideas, while another may continually return to rearranging topics and subtopics. Since any stage of the process may precede any other stage, and any stage may follow any other, writers can move from worrying to improving to committing or from committing to improving to worrying--or any combination thereof.

The point is, we each write in our own preferred fashion. What works for one

writer does not necessarily work for another writer. In part, this is what makes teaching writing such a challenge.

Further Reading:

Harris, M. (1989). Composing behaviors of one- and multi-draft writers. *College English, 51*(2), February, 174-191.

The Role Of Reading In Writing

On two levels, effective writing requires effective reading. In general terms, reading provides one with a body of textual experience and knowledge. The more we have read, the more likely we are to be familiar with common text patterns and structures. Because we have read *x* number of novels, editorials, and essays, we have certain expectations for the next novels, editorials, and essays that we may read. We come to expect novels to build to a climax and to reach a resolution. We come to expect editorials to take a stance and to be persuasive. We come to expect essays to contain an introduction, body, and conclusion. In other words, we come to internalize the characteristics of the genres.

Smith (1982) states, "Genre schemes are templates for a writer. . . . To know in advance that chapters, or paragraphs, or even sentences, should be arranged in a particular way is like having a map of otherwise unknown territory" (p. 119). Those who have a poor background in reading are essentially driving without a map. Because they are unfamiliar with text patterns and structures, their expectations for essays may not coincide with common academic expectations. Simply, their experience with text may not have provided the knowledge that essays should include things such as topic sentences, supporting details, and transitions.

This is why it is important that GED students be introduced to good essays. As they read well-structured essays, students have a chance to internalize the essay format. They come to expect to read an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Then when they write essays the same expectation holds: they expect to write an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Smith (1983) states, "To write poetry, read it" (p. 560). We would add, To write essays, read them.

In more specific terms, reading plays yet another role in writing. At some point in the writing process, writers become readers. As Murray (1982) states, "You can read without writing, but you can't write without reading" (p. 141). The shift from writer to reader is a fundamental part of the writing process.

To make the shift from writer to reader, writers must stop, mentally back away from the text, and imagine themselves as their audience. Who is the audience likely to be? What background knowledge is the audience likely to possess? Why will the audience be reading the text? Such questions direct the writer into an appropriate role as reader. Having imagined themselves into this new role, the writer can then approach the text not as its creator, but as its audience. In the case of the GED essay, audience analysis is relatively straightforward. The audience is the GED scorer who has an extensive background in reading similar essays and who is reading the essay in order to evaluate it.

Further Reading:

Murray, D. M. (1982). Teaching the other self: The writer's first reader. *College Composition and Communication, 33*(2), May, 140-147.

STRATEGIES

In this notebook, the writing process is characterized as having three interrelated components that take place, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes separately. For our purposes these components are labeled "worrying, committing, and improving," and each has unique aspects that tend to set it somewhat apart from the others. The previous section explains the nature of the writing process as well as the components or phases. This section will present classroom strategies, exercises, and activities for you to use in relation to the three components. Each strategy begins with a short explanation or rationale for use followed by specific activities for practice. Also included is information on how to use the video effectively and on the GED scoring system. The outline below is an overview of the following pages.

I. WORRYING

- A. Pre-text
- B. Text-based

II. COMMITTING

- A. Writing sentences
  - 1. Why start with sentences
  - 2. Exercises for sentence practice
- B. Writing a paragraph
  - 1. What is a paragraph
  - 2. How do sentences in a paragraph go together
  - 3. How can students practice paragraphing
  - 4. Exercises for paragraph practice

C. Writing the essay

1. What is an essay
2. What are the parts of an essay
3. How to organize for essay writing
4. What are some common ways to organize information
5. How to write essays
6. Exercises for essay practice

III. IMPROVING

A. Editing

B. Revising

1. Reading and revising
2. Detection, diagnosis, correction
3. Supporting revision

IV. SCORING THE GED ESSAY

V. USING THE VIDEO

WORRYING

Worrying	Thinking about piece Generating ideas Exploring approaches, point of view Talking about ideas Considering audience Searching for message Planning text structure Arranging and rearranging ideas Ordering topics, subtopics Jotting down phrases, sentences

Worrying is probably the most globally defined stage of the writing process. In broadest terms, everything that prepares one for writing falls into the worrying stage. Thus reading, thinking, and talking are all part of this stage.

More specifically, worrying takes place on two levels: pre-text and text-based. At the pre-text level, writers engage in activities that are preparatory to writing. Writers may think or talk about writing, often in a setting totally unrelated to actual pen-in-hand writing. One may, for instance, mull over ideas as one is washing the dishes or walking the dog. This is also the stage in which writing anxiety is likely to be highest. At this level, writers delve into the pool of possible topics and approaches. They begin to select ideas and juxtapose them against one another, scaffolding a structure to support the upcoming text.

For GED essay writers, this pre-text worrying must be condensed into, at most, about five minutes. Given the 45 minute time constraint, essay writers simply do not have the luxury of spending much time thinking about the piece during the test itself. In fact, much of the GED essay writer's worrying is done before they even enter the room to take the test.

At the text-based level of the worrying stage, words are actually written on paper,

though often in ways that make sense only to the writer. This is the stage for initial scribblings. Outlining or mapping may be initiated. Key words may be jotted down. Phrases or sentences may be written. At this point, whatever is written is highly tentative and subject to change.

Inexperienced writers often struggle with the idea of tentativeness, believing that whatever they commit to paper must be right the first time. "In short, we try to help students see a basic truth: that meaning is more often shaped through revision than through prewriting agony in which one tries to 'get it right' in a first and final draft" (Strong, 1987, p. 23). Try to help your students see that, though words may be written, they are not written in stone.

Brainstorming

In brainstorming, one generates as many ideas as possible on a given topic in a short period of time.

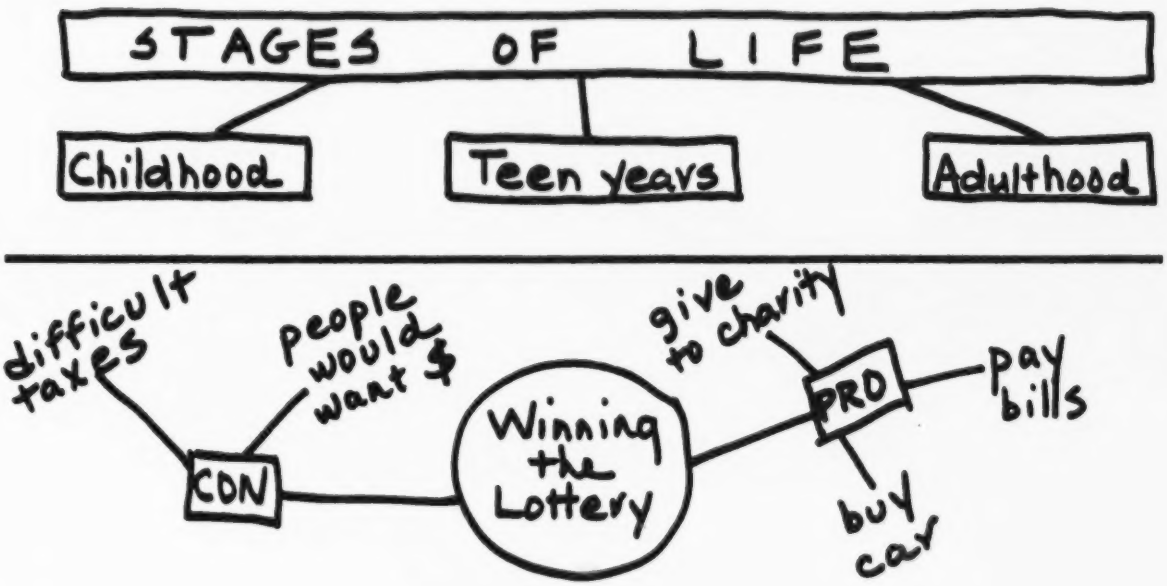
Suggestions:

- Accept and record all ideas. At this point, make no judgments about the value of the ideas.
- Try brainstorming in a group. The ideas of one person often spark new ideas in another.
- Brainstorm in twos, then come back to the group and share ideas.
- Not all people speak out in a group. Include reticent speakers by having people write their ideas. You can then write the ideas on the board or share them with the group.

Mapping

Maps are diagrams of ideas. The beauty of maps is that, by their very nature, they show relationships between topics, subtopics, and details.

Example:



Further Reading:

Miccinati, J. L. (1988). Mapping the terrain: Connecting reading with academic writing. *Journal of Writing, 31*(6), March, 542-552.

Freewriting, Focused Freewriting

Freewriting is stream-of-consciousness writing. One simply starts writing and does not stop for a certain time period.

Focused freewriting is freewriting on a particular topic.

Suggestions:

- Start with short time periods. Three minutes of continuous writing may be plenty for inexperienced writers. Gradually increase writing time, perhaps to ten minutes.
- Everyone writes, including the teacher.
- Spelling

    1) Take your best guess.
    2) Write the first letter or two of the word, draw a line for the unknown part.
    3) Draw a line for the whole word.

- Writer's block

    1) Write "I don't know what to write I don't know what to write" until you *do* know what to write.
    2) Write your last word or phrase over and over again until something new occurs to you.
    3) Write anything! Just keep writing.

Further Reading:

Elbow, P. (1981). *Writing with power: Techniques for mastering the writing process.* New York: Oxford University Press

COMMITTING

Committing	Selecting topics and subtopics Organizing ideas Translating ideas into text Structuring piece Drafting

It would seem that this stage is both the heart and mystery of the writing process. As Smith (1982) states, "The actual writing becomes lost in a fuzzy area between the (prewriting and rewriting)" (p. 104).

Writing, the actual transcription of thoughts into words, involves choice. Theoretically, all possibilities are open to all writers. Realistically, however, the requirements of the GED essay restrict the possibilities. Certain choices have already been made for the GED essay writer.

The GED essay writer must work within the well-defined framework of the 3-5 paragraph essay. Decisions as to format, style, and topic are set. In this case, the writer's decisions relate primarily to approach, structure, and organization. The following pages discuss these in terms of sentence, paragraph, and essay development.

Further Reading:

McCutchen, D. (1984). Writing as a linguistic problem. *Educational Psychologist, 19*(4), 226-238.

Writing Sentences

Why start with sentences

Sentences focus on conveying a complete thought in much the same way that a

paragraph and an entire essay convey complete ideas. Students will become competent using a variety of sentence structures if they practice by actually creating their own sentences. Of minimal help is analyzing others' sentences from books. In working with sentences, teaching should be done in the context of longer pieces of writing so that relationships between sentences can be discussed. A good understanding of sentence structure and how to manipulate it are essential to writing longer pieces.

Exercises for sentence practice

There are several ways to practice sentence construction. Open-ended prompts that ask writers to complete the thought are appropriate for getting started. Examples might be "If I was the boss . . ." or "If I could be anything I wanted, I would be. . . ." Although these are not strictly expository in nature, they ease reluctant or inexperienced writers into language manipulation.

Another activity is to ask students to create sentences using specific words or in response to specific questions. This could be done in conjunction with the worrying phase or idea generation task. Have students take a map of ideas related to a topic and generate sentences from the various pieces. Better still, ask students to generate idea maps that use complete sentences rather than a single word or a short phrase. This would reinforce that sentences convey meaning, not just information, as single words or phrases do. Spend time examining the written sentences for action verbs, descriptive phrases, and specific rather than general words.

Sentence combining is an excellent activity to teach manipulation of sentence structures. Good sentences are more interesting to read when they don't all sound alike, so give practice in moving parts of sentences to different positions in the sentence. Or combine several simple sentences into compound and/or complex sentences.

Sentence expansion is related to sentence combining as an activity that provides

practice in how to vary what is said. In expansion activities ask students to add enriching details to a simple sentence prompt. You can practice on specific parts of speech, for example, use of adjectives or appositives. This helps in recognizing and writing more meaningful sentences, rather than simply sentences that give a minimum of information.

Sentence practice can teach the conventions of English as a subgroup of skills needed in sentence construction. Through sentence generating students' need for practice on specific skills can be pinpointed and then appropriate grammar work sheets assigned individually.

Writing a Paragraph

What is a paragraph

A paragraph is an organized series of sentences written logically to present a single idea and has three key elements. These are the main idea, the supporting details, and the transitions between sentences. In most paragraphs, the first sentence is the topic sentence stating the main idea. It tells the reader what the paragraph will be about. The rest of the sentences support the main idea by providing specific details that explain the topic. Transitions are words or phrases that help the reader move smoothly from point to point. A list of common transitions is provided on page 37.

How do sentences in a paragraph go together

In planning a paragraph it is important to arrange the ideas in a clear and logical order for your reader. After writing the topic sentence, you then give the facts or

reasons to support it. Two principles to guide you in organizing your sentences are listed below:

1. Keep together all sentences relating to the same idea
2. Early in the paragraph put ideas that are necessary to understanding ideas presented later in the paragraph.

Look at a single paragraph as a mini-essay with a beginning (the topic sentence), a middle (details), and an end (last idea related to topic and/or transition sentence to next paragraph). The ideas in the paragraph are taken from those generated in the Worrying phase of the writing process. You should have those written in some kind of map or outline to follow. The paragraph should represent a major point to be made. If you are writing a longer piece with several paragraphs, each one should relate to the thesis or main topic and at the same time develop a major point.

How can students practice paragraphing

Paragraphing, like other skills, develops with practice in a non-threatening atmosphere. All writers and especially inexperienced writers need to produce many samples so that they realize that everything written is not perfect the first time around. Practice should provide *many* opportunities to write, even if what's written is often not good. Exercises for practice should help strengthen the writer's understanding of how the ideas and sentences work in the paragraph. One of the most effective ways to present paragraphing is to model the process, that is, to actually write a paragraph (on a board or overhead transparency). As the model writer, you should "talk through" your process. Begin with how you decide what the entire paragraph will convey, and make this a topic sentence. Then string together details in sentences that support the topic sentence. As you model this, pay little attention to the mechanics of spelling and punctuation at this point in order to reinforce the idea that getting the ideas down in some reasonable fashion is most important. Hopefully, you will find yourself doing

the recursive activities that writing involves. Just be sure to clue in your audience as to how you're thinking about the task. Students will appreciate knowing that the uncertainties they feel are natural to the process.

Exercises for paragraph practice

Some of the following suggested activities can be modified for group work.

A. Find a sample of a good paragraph and rearrange the sentences. Ask students to put the sentences in the order they think is best. Have the students compare their paragraph with each others and then with the original. Discuss the similarities and differences.

B. Find a sample of a good paragraph and delete the topic sentence. Ask students to write their own topic sentence. Read and discuss.

C. Present a first and last sentence of a paragraph and ask students to supply several appropriate sentences for the middle. Write your own sentences or adapt from a sample good paragraph. Discuss.

D. Use a paragraph sample (original, text, or student) and delete transitional words and phrases. Have students fill in the appropriate transitions.

E. Have one student write a topic sentence and then have others add appropriate sentences that support the topic as given.

F. Present several paragraph samples in which you've inserted irrelevant sentences (ones that may relate to something in the paragraph but are not necessary details for support of topic). Have students identify these.

Paragraph writing is part of the committing phase and as such can be practiced in relation to the whole essay. Some students may need practice on single paragraphs in order to feel competent in getting down their ideas. Others may be able to begin with an essay thesis and write the whole essay of several paragraphs. Good paragraph writing (and ultimately good essay writing) comes with practice through time spent actually writing. Encourage students to think about how they are getting their ideas

across. It helps if you model the process along with them.

Writing the Essay

What is an essay

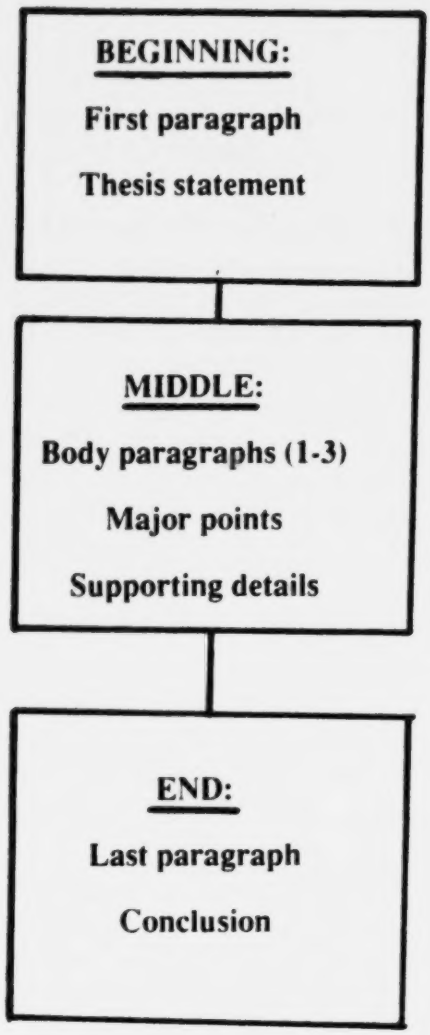
An essay is a piece of writing that explains a single subject and often gives the views of the writer. It contains an overall point of view or theme called a thesis, and this is actually a direct statement (sentence) which says what the author intends to write about throughout the piece. An essay presents information in a tightly written form; that is, it generally contains three to five closely related paragraphs. The number of paragraphs, however, is not the most important aspect. More importantly is to look at the essay as having three parts: a beginning, a middle, and an end. Sometimes these are called an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Each part, in turn, helps to explain the single subject of the piece by having a particular function as explained below.

What are the parts of an essay

The beginning, or first part, states the thesis for the reader and explains how the subject will be developed. This becomes the first paragraph. The middle consists of paragraphs which support the thesis by providing details. This section is usually one to three paragraphs with the number being determined by the points being made to support the main idea or thesis. The points are presented in an order of importance depending on the writer's plan. The end briefly summarizes and ties together the ideas given in the middle and does not introduce any new ideas. This is the last paragraph of the essay.

How do the parts go together

The diagram illustrates the form of an essay.



How to organize for essay writing

Students should begin with their generated ideas in hand and organized in a written format such as a list, an outline, or a map. This format reflects the selection of pertinent ideas and details to be included in the essay content. The thesis or main idea should be stated early in the draft, preferably the first paragraph, so the reader knows quickly what to expect. This main or central idea continues to unify throughout the essay although more implicitly.

The organization of the essay is often determined by the topic itself. For instance, if the topic asks for advantages and disadvantages of an issue, the writer then sets up the essay to address these two areas in the middle paragraphs or body. Students should carefully read the topic prompt given and determine if an organizational plan is given. If not, students should review the organizing principle used in the Worrying phase for generating ideas. A listing of topic prompts appropriate to the GED can be found on page 48. Use these as models for determining the most effective organization plan for each. Some of the more common organizational forms are given below.

What are some common ways to organize information

Ideas are presented in sentences within paragraphs. All of the ideas are related to the main or central idea. In the essay this is the thesis statement; in a paragraph this is the topic sentence. For ease of understanding these ideas should be presented in a coherent form that shows the relationship of the details to one another. On page 28 are four common forms for organizing.

Time order or sequence	Something that occurs in a step-by-step order. First one thing, then another. Often used to write about a process (how to do something).
Order of importance	Listing ideas according to importance, most to least or least to most. Used to write a narrative list.
Cause and effect	Used to answer what and why questions in an explanation that looks at the relationship of events to situations.
Compare and contrast	Looking at similarities and differences, advantages and disadvantages, likes and dislikes, pro and con, etc.

How to write essays

As with all skills, writing essays takes practice in actually writing. By the time students reach the point of working with a whole (essay), they should have reduced their anxiety about writing as an activity, but they will still need many opportunities to work through the process with their ideas. That means a de-emphasis on a "perfect" first draft, or even a second and third at this time. Model for students by writing an essay on an overhead or on large paper. Begin with the first paragraph and the thesis statement. Use your generated ideas that are now in some organized written form. Often lip service is paid to the Worrying phase activities in the sense that those ideas are not really used as a format for the written task. You, too, should not emphasize the mechanical aspects. If you do find yourself in the recursive process of needing to revise or improve, do it as you normally do (for example, erasures, insertions, arrows, strikeovers) for this reinforces for the inexperienced writer that competent writers function in this way. No one writes best the first time. Continue

modeling the essay writing by producing the body paragraphs; again using the worrying ideas as the guide. Write the last paragraph as a conclusion.

Exercises for essay practice

Many of the following suggestions can be used for group work.

A. Take a sample essay and delete the thesis statement from the first paragraph. Have students read the essay minus this statement and then write their own.

B. Use the list of sample topic prompts (Appendix A) and have students determine the most effective organizational format for each.

C. Have students read several essays and identify the organizational development.

D. Take a sample essay and insert a paragraph that is only marginally related to the topic. Have students read to see if they can identify the paragraph that interrupts the unity of the whole piece.

E. Eliminate transitional words, phrases, and sentences from an essay and have students write their own in order to develop the connections and smoothness necessary to good writing.

F. Practice writing introductions and conclusions by working with essays that have one or the other deleted. Have students write their own, being sure to keep the unity and development of the ideas consistent.

Further Reading:

Camburn, L. (No date). *Writing the GED essay: A guide for teachers and students*. Pascagoula, MS: Pascagoula School District.

IMPROVING

	Switching from writer to reader
	Reading
	Evaluating, critiquing
	Correcting
Improving	Inserting
	Deleting
	Substituting
	Consolidating
	Rearranging
	Restructuring

Editing

Writers can improve their text in two major ways: by editing and by revising. In editing, the writer evaluates the text to see that it conforms to the conventions of standard English. Editing is the proofreading act that polishes the draft and presents it in a standard style. This is when the writer should be concerned about correctness. Are words spelled correctly? Are grammar rules followed? Is usage appropriate? The changes made in editing are routinely mechanical. In fact, because ideas are not the focus here, the editor can easily be someone other than the writer.

Becoming a good editor involves knowing the conventions of English. Traditional workbook exercises are good for practicing these. On page 34 there is a list of common proofing marks that might be helpful. Exchanging papers with others who use the same proofing system is also a good way to practice editing skills.

Revising

Reading and revising

By far, editing is easier than revising. To be prompted to revise, the writer must shift into the role of reader. (See pages 12-13.) In this role, the writer becomes a reader looking for the meaning in the text. The difficult part of the shift is separating oneself from a context of "I know what I wanted to say" to one of "What does this mean?" This is sometimes hard to do because now the writer is not the creator of meaning but the receiver of meaning. In traditional writing instruction this role has been played by the teacher who becomes the "grader," thus the writer has not had a chance to practice this self-evaluation.

Many writers are reluctant to take on the role of reader, perhaps because the consequences can seem so overwhelming. The expectation is that the writer-as-reader will identify ideas that are not well said or do not communicate the intended meaning, then change structures and rework ideas in order to enhance meaning. This may entail considerable rewriting.

In fact, we have been told by some writers that their reluctance to reread reflects their reluctance to revise. If they reread, rewriting looms. If they don't reread, rewriting cannot loom.

Detection, diagnosis, correction

In the role of reader, the writer can detect discrepancies between the delivered message and the intended message. The fundamental question that the writer-as-reader must ask is, "Am I saying what I mean to say, and have I said it in such a way that it makes sense?" As writers we may know that what we are *trying* to say is "x." As readers, however, we can recognize that what we have actually said is "y." Recognizing such a discrepancy results in a certain dissonance, a feeling that the text is

somehow missing the mark (Sommers, 1988). Detecting a discrepancy in the text is, however, only the beginning.

"Detecting a problem doesn't mean that the writer can solve it--he may not even know what the problem is" (Flower, Hayes, Carey, Schriver, & Stratman, 1986, p. 36) . In other words, inexperienced writers may be able to detect problems, but not diagnose them. They may not be able to recognize the source of the problem or how to fix it, which may account for their tendency to make poor revisions (Bartlett, 1982; Faigley & Witte, 1981).

Inexperienced writers may detect a problem and revise but not *improve* their text. As Bartlett (1982) states, "Good detection and identification need not necessarily lead to an appropriate correction" (p. 355). In part this may be because inexperienced writers tend to revise at a low level, often focusing on word or phrase changes. "They concentrate on particular words apart from their role in the text" (Sommers, 1988, p. 122). Researchers suggest that this is because inexperienced writers do not see the text in global terms (Sommers, 1988). Rather, they see discrete parts, lacking a vision of the parts (words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs) in relation to the whole (the essay). Effective correction requires an awareness of the whole text.

Supporting revision

The good news is that the quality of revisions produced by inexperienced writers improves when peer and instructor feedback is involved (Bartlett, 1982). By providing objectivity, outside readers can assist and direct the writer in detection ("Something's wrong here"), diagnosis ("I think this is the problem"), and correction ("Try this"). Therein lies part of the value of sharing one's writing.

Whether by the writer-as-reader or by an outside reader, certain questions should be asked about the text. For instance, what is the central idea? Is it supported by details and examples? Is there a logical organization followed? Are shifts within the

text signaled by transitions that indicate where the text is headed? Are ideas clearly stated? What is the author's point of view? Is there a beginning, middle, and end?

To help students look at the essay after reading, the Essay Structure Checklist on page 37 is one useful tool, as it highlights the elements that should be addressed in an essay.

Through practice in self-evaluation, writers can become more proficient at revising. Eventually, the teacher's role as evaluator will be diminished. It is then that the inexperienced writer becomes the independent writer.

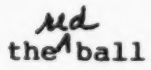
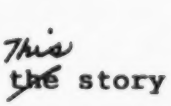
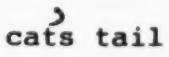
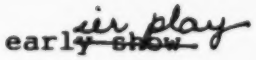
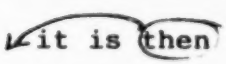
Further Readings:

Bartlett, E. J. (1982). Learning to revise: Some component processes. In Nystrand, M. (Ed.), *What writers know: The language, process, and structure of written discourse*(pp. 345-363). New York: Academic Press.

Flower, L., Hayes, J. R., Carey, L., Schriver, K., & Stratman, J. (1986). Detection, diagnosis, and the strategies of revision. *College Composition and Communication, 37*(1), February, 16-55.

Common Editing Marks

Below are some basic proofing techniques used by professional editors that may be helpful.

EXPLANATION	*MARK*
1. Indicate inserted words and letter by using a caret	
2. Indicate a deletion by using mark or by crossing out	
3. Draw in the appropriate punctuation where it is needed	
4. Correct or change by crossing out and writing desired form above	
5. Circle and draw arrows to show where words should be moved	
6. Indicate need for a capital letter	

Paragraph Improving Checklist

Take a paragraph that you have written, and while you are reading it over, think about what you would like to change. The list below contains many of the aspects that good paragraphs have. Put a check next to each item that needs to be changed in your paragraph.

_____uses specific words

_____uses vivid words

_____combines ideas

_____varies the way sentences begin

_____varies the way sentences are put together

_____includes enough details

_____sticks to the main idea

_____uses complete sentences

_____doesn't use unnecessary words

_____doesn't use rambling sentences

_____uses an interesting opening sentence

_____uses an interesting closing sentence

_____has a clear topic sentence

_____uses transitions between sentences

Now make whatever changes your paragraph needs. If the paragraph is a complete product (that is, not part of a longer piece of work), you should edit it. The editing task involves checking spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Essay Structure Checklist

Use this checklist with a completed draft of an essay. Read what you have written and respond completely to each item in order to improve (revise) your essay. Put a check next to each item that needs to be changed.

_____Have I addressed the topic and responded to the basic question?

_____Have I written an introductory paragraph?

_____Does my introductory paragraph contain one or two preliminary sentences related to the topic?

_____Does my introduction end with a statement which gives my opinion and the major reasons for that opinion?

_____Does the body of my essay devote at least one paragraph to each of the reasons (points) mentioned in my topic statement?

_____Is my most important reason (point) the last paragraph in my essay?

_____Have I written a conclusion?

_____Does my conclusion *briefly* summarize the points of my essay?

_____Do I use examples to make my points clear to the reader?

Transitions

Transitions are words and phrases that are used to signal your reader that you are going from one idea to another. They can be used between sentences or paragraphs. Sometimes an entire sentence acts as a transition. The list below gives some of the common transitions and how they are used.

To add similar information:

along with	in addition
also	moreover
and	not only . . . but also
as well as	too
furthermore	

To introduce an example:

for example	such as
for instance	to illustrate

To explain time relationships:

after	following	since then
at the same time	last	then
at times	meanwhile	to begin with
before	next	when
during	not long after	while
finally	now that	until
first (second, etc.)	o	

To discuss causes and effects:

as a result	nevertheless	
because	since	
consequently	so	
for that reason	so that	
if . . . then	therefore	

To compare things:

also	similarly
likewise	too
not only . . . but also	

To contrast things:

although	however	unless
as opposed to	in contrast	whereas
but	nevertheless	while
despite	on the contrary	yet
even though	on the other hand	
except	still	

To conclude:

finally	then	in conclusion

SCORING THE GED ESSAY

The GED essay will be scored holistically. "The term *holistic scoring* refers to the practice of having a rater read the essay and make an overall judgement about its quality" (Crocker, 1987, p. 48). This means that the writing will be judged on its overall effectiveness rather than on analysis for specific errors. The paper will be read through once and viewed as to organization, support, and control of the English language. Readers will look for a beginning, middle, and end. Readers are aware that the piece turned in is really a first draft, so it may contain some errors.

A six-point scale is used for evaluation. Readers decide whether a paper belongs in the upper half or the lower half of the scale. They then assign the number that best describes the paper's effectiveness based on certain criteria. Ordinarily, two readers score the paper. In the event that there is a difference of more than one point between the two readers' scores, a third reader is brought in to also score the essay. The criteria for each scoring level (1-6 and 0) are illustrated on pages 40 and 41. These should be helpful to you and your students in evaluating practice essays in preparation for the test itself.

Further Readings:

Crocker, L. (1987, Fall). Assessment of writing skills through essay tests. In D. Bray & M. J. Belcher (Eds.), *Issues in student assessment* (pp. 45-54). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

GED Testing Service. (1985). *The 1988 tests of general educational development: A preview*. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education.

CRITERIA FOR RATING THE GED WRITING SAMPLE

Criteria	Level 6	Level 5	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
Purpose	Demonstrates clear and definite understanding of purpose of task	Demonstrates acceptable understanding of purpose of task	Demonstrates evidence of understanding of purpose of task	Demonstrates some evidence of understanding of purpose, but may include digressions	Demonstrates little understanding of purpose of task	Minimally addresses the assigned topic
Content	Content includes several highly substantive ideas	Content includes clearly stated, relevant ideas	Content includes sufficient, appropriate ideas	Content is limited to simple listing or haphazard recitation of ideas	Content is marked by superficial or inappropriate ideas	Content is marked by lack of appropriate ideas
Organization	Develops topic with a logical and coherent plan of organization	Develops topic with a clear plan of organization	Develops topic with an adequate plan of organization	Develops topic with a limited or insufficient plan of organization	Develops topic with little or no plan of organization	Plan of organization not generally evident
Support	Uses support material that is relevant, specific, and substantive	Provides effective support for each major point	Provides sufficient, but less effective, support material	Support material is insufficient or irrelevant	Support material is inadequate or unsupported	Support material is generally not evident
Language	Uses specific, vivid, precise language	Uses appropriate language but somewhat less vivid or specific	Uses appropriate language	Uses trite, ordinary, imprecise language	Uses immature or inappropriate language	Language often fails to communicate
CSWE	Uses Conventions of Standard Written English with few or no errors in mechanics	Demonstrates controlled use of CSWE with only occasional errors in mechanics	Use of CSWE is generally reliable and errors in mechanics do not interfere with communication	Repeated weakness in the CSWE which interferes with communication	Errors in the CSWE seriously interfere with communication	Demonstrates lack of control of the CSWE

A Zero Paper

Is a blank paper; OR

Is illegible; i.e., includes so many indecipherable words that no sense can be made of the response; OR

Is off-topic: written on a topic other than the one assigned.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ABBREVIATED RATING SCALE FOR GED WRITING SAMPLE

	Upper Half			Lower Half		
CRITERIA	6	5	4	3	2	1
Understanding of Purpose (Task)	clear definite	acceptable	some evidence	some evidence but digression	inadequate	minimal or none
Content (Evidence of Ideas)	several substantive ideas	clearly stated, relevant ideas	appropriate, sufficient ideas	superficial or limited	inappropriate or insufficient	lack of ideas
Organization (Plan of Development)	logical, coherent plan	clear plan	adequate plan	limited plan	inadequate	little or no plan
Support Materials (for Ideas)	relevant, specific, substantive	effective for each point	sufficient, but less effective or convincing	insufficient or irrelevant	inadequate or unsupported	not evident
Language	specific, vivid, precise	appropriate; less vivid or specific	appropriate only	trite, ordinary, imprecise	immature or inappropriate	often fails to communicate
Conventions of Standard Written English	used consistently; few or no errors	demonstrates control; only occasional errors	generally reliable; errors do not interfere	repeated weakness; errors interfere	little control; errors seriously interfere	lack of control

USING THE VIDEO

The "GED Essay Writing" video was designed with a number of purposes in mind. Most importantly, we felt the video should model the writing process. The internal nature of writing makes it a rather difficult process to portray. Still, we felt that students could benefit from watching someone else confront the writing process. We also wanted to address the high anxiety which many GED students feel about writing. By bringing the issue of writing anxiety into the forefront, the video can prompt students to discuss their fears. Hopefully this will result in reduced levels of anxiety for them. Further, we wanted you as writing teachers to take an active part in interpreting the video to your students. As you prepared to use the video, we wanted you to have to think about your own approaches to and feelings about the writing process. Finally, we wanted to entertain!

Below are two suggested ways in which you can use the video.

SEQUENCE #1

1) Show Video

2) Activities

- Write the essay that you think the student in the video wrote. (This can be done individually, in pairs, or as a group.) Copies of the drafts for the essay actually written in the video are on pages 44-47.
- Write the essay that you would have written, given the same topic.
- Discuss how the student approached her writing task. How might she have improved her approach?

SEQUENCE #2

1) Activities

- Discuss with your students how they would go about writing an essay in 45 minutes.

- Give your students questions to focus their attention on particular aspects of the video. Examples: As you watch the video, pay attention to the stages that the student goes through to generate her essay. (Worrying, committing, improving, also called prewriting, writing, rewriting.) In terms of writing, where does this writer invest most of her time? (In the worrying or prewriting stage.)

2) Show Video

3) Follow Up Discussion

- How did the student go about writing her essay? Did she spend her time efficiently or inefficiently? Do you spend your time efficiently or inefficiently? Is there a *right* way to spend your time when you write? How would you approach the same assignment if you had, say, one week in which to do it?

- Talk about the apparent anxiety the student was feeling. What it is about the GED essay exam that generates anxiety? How can one reduce this anxiety?

Drafts of the Essay: "If I Won the Lottery"

DRAFT #1

Many of us fantasize about winning the lottery. We think that winning a million dollars will make us happy. And it might!

Problem:

The phrase "make us happy" is too narrow, in that it only leads to one side of the discussion. Need to broaden that statement so that it leads to advantages and disadvantages both.

DRAFT #2

Many of us fantasize about striking it rich. We think that money will change our lives.

If I won a million dollars, I could pay all of the bills and buy a new, reliable car. I could afford to go back to school, to get the education I've always wanted. I could buy presents for my family and friends, to make their lives a little better. I could donate money to my favorite charities, and I could donate a long-overdue vacation to myself!

Yes, life would be better if I won the lottery.

Problems:

Change from paragraph one to paragraph two is abrupt. Need transition sentence there.

Paragraph two only addresses advantages. Add another paragraph that talks about disadvantages.

DRAFT #3

Many of us fantasize about striking it rich. We think that money will change our lives. It might, but what kind of change might result?

If I won a million dollars, I could pay all of the bills and buy a new, reliable car. I could afford to go back to school, to get the education I've always wanted. I could buy presents for my family and friends, to make their lives a little better. I could donate money to my favorite charities, and I could donate a long-overdue vacation to myself!

But my financial life would be more complicated. My taxes would be more complicated. In fact, I'd have to hire an accountant to help me with my finances. Also, new people might develop an interest in me. People would try to cheat me out of my money, including dishonest people and odd causes. Thieves might also bother me.

Yes, life would be better if I won the lottery.

Problems:

Probably shouldn't start paragraph three with the conjunction "but." Need a transition to indicate that I'm shifting from talking about the advantages to talking about the disadvantages.

Conclusion no longer fits, since the third paragraph is all about disadvantages. Rewrite.

DRAFT #4

Many of us fantasize about striking it rich. We think that money will change our lives. It might, but what kind of change might result?

Winning a million dollars does have its "up" side. If I won a million dollars, I could pay all of the bills and buy a new, reliable car. I could afford to go back to

school, to get the education I've always wanted. I could buy presents for my family and friends, to make their lives a little better. I could donate money to my favorite charities, and I could donate a long-overdue vacation to myself! Those are some of the advantages, but what about the disadvantages?

There must be a "down" side to winning a million dollars. My financial life would be more complicated. My taxes would be more complicated. In fact, I'd have to hire an accountant to help me with my finances. Also, new people might develop an interest in me. People would try to cheat me out of my money, including dishonest people and odd causes. Thieves might also bother me.

Winning the lottery would change my life, for both better and for worse.

Problems:

Generally, this is okay, but it could be better with some fine-tuning. For instance, can make the thesis statement more specific. Can also add "subcategories" for the advantages and disadvantages. Example: paying bills and buying car are all basics, buying presents and donating to charities are luxuries.

FINAL DRAFT

Many of us dream of striking it rich, of someday winning the lottery. We think that money will change our lives dramatically. It might, but will the change be for the better or for the worse?

Winning a million dollars does have its "up" side. certainly I could take care of the basics. I could pay all of the bills and buy a new, reliable car. (No more breakdowns!) After taking care of the basics, I could work on self-improvement. I could afford to go back to school, to get the education I've always wanted. Finally, some luxuries would be in order. I could buy presents for my family and friends, to make

their lives a little better. I could donate money to my favorite charities, and I could donate a long-overdue vacation to myself! Those are some of the advantages, but what about the disadvantages?

There must be a "down" side to winning a million dollars. My financial life would certainly be more complex. My IRS representative and I would become close. In fact, I would have to hire an accountant to help me sort out my finances. Further, a whole new group of people might develop an interest in me. Shady business people would try to cheat me out of my money, and questionable causes would pursue me for donations. Burglars might also take an interest in my fortune. My good fortune could become their good fortune! Yes, there are disadvantages.

Winning the lottery would change my life, for both better and for worse. I may still dream of striking it rich; I'll just dream more realistically.

APPENDIX

Sample Topics for GED

Below are several sample topic prompts similar to the ones likely to appear on the test itself. Use these to give students practice in a test-like situation. Also use when discussing how to organize an essay based on the task asked for in the prompt. Help students visualize using the prompts in the Worrying phase of the writing process. Interestingly enough most prompts cue a logical organizational format as well as visual ideas.

A. Many people in our lives have had a positive effect on us. It might have been a grandparent who shared his or her time and experience with us. Perhaps it was a boss who gave us an opportunity to show what we could do. Write a paper describing someone who has had a positive effect on you. Give specific details about this person and how s/he changed or influenced your life.

B. A tornado warning has just been announced over the radio! You must leave your house and go to a nearby city. You can only take three objects with you. What would you take? Write a composition in which you tell what three objects you would take in this situation. Describe each object in detail and give reasons for your choices.

C. The world is full of interesting people: actors, politicians, athletes, musicians, etc. Imagine that you were able to meet any three people in the world. Who would you choose? Write a composition of about 200 words identifying three people you would like to meet. Describe each person and the reasons you would like to meet them.

D. Recent best sellers have discussed and debated the life stages that each of us experiences and the activities or behaviors that are typical of each. If you were asked to divide your life into three stages, what would you call each stage and how would you describe them? Write a paper identifying and describing the three stages of your life to date. Be specific and include example when possible.

E. Every job has its good and bad points. In some jobs, the good points outweigh the bad points. Those are usually the jobs people find most rewarding! Write a paper describing a rewarding job you have had or would like to have. Explain both the advantages and disadvantages of the job. Be specific and use examples. Tell why you want this job in spite of the disadvantages.

F. Television has come a long way since its introduction to the American family about 30 years ago. In those days, programs were only in black and white, and few families owned a T.V. set. Today most families own at least one T.V. and enjoy watching a variety of programs. There are both advantages and disadvantages to our growing attachment to television. Write a composition explaining the advantages and disadvantages of Americans watching more television. Be specific and support your ideas with examples.

G. Shopping malls have become places for people to socialize. Families go to the mall together, teenagers meet their friends there, and clubs and social organizations frequently sponsor activities at the mall. Write a 200-word composition discussing several reasons people are attracted to shopping malls.

H. Increased drug and alcohol abuse is a problem that concerns many people. The misuse of drugs and alcohol is so common in athletics that testing programs have been set up for athletes. Certainly many parents are worried about their children becoming involved with drugs and alcohol. Write a 200-word composition discussing several reasons that people abuse drugs or alcohol. Why are they attracted to these substances in spite of the dangers?

I. Many people are interested in physical fitness and good health today. Jane Fonda sells workout tapes to help us get in shape. Health food stores remind us the "We are what we eat!" Everybody seems to want to look good and feel good. Write a paper discussing some of the causes for this increased interest in our bodies. Then tell how this interest is both beneficial and harmful to people. Be sure to support your opinions with good reasons.

J. We are well into the computer age in the United States. Banks, businesses, schools, and even churches use computers to make their work easier. Our increased use of computers has affected society in many ways. Write an essay discussing some of the reasons for the increasing use of computers. Then tell how this has been both beneficial and harmful to society.

K. Teenagers across the nation spend hours cruising in cars: visiting with friends, showing off their car, and finding out what's happening. Some people think cruising is an acceptable way of socializing; other people object to it. Write a composition of about 200 words expressing your opinion on cruising.

L. Parent and student groups are working together to alert the public to the problem of drunken driving. They are asking voters to support tougher punishments for people who drink and drive. These punishments might include losing a driver's license or going to jail. Write a composition of about 200 words expressing your opinion on tougher laws against drunken driving.

M. The American family has changed in many ways over the years. There are more single parent families, more families where both parents work, and more families with fewer children. Write a composition of about 200 words describing an important change in the American family. Express your opinion about whether this change has had a positive or negative effect on our society.

N. Americans enjoy many different types of music; rock, gospel, jazz, and country are some. Everyone has a favorite type. While we may not agree which kind of music is best, most people are aware that music affects our moods and can have tremendous impact on our lives. Choose one specific type of music that you believe affects the lives of listeners today. Write a composition about how this music affects them in either a positive or negative way.

O. For more than twenty years, the dangers of smoking have been well known. Yet recent surveys show that more than 40 million Americans continue to smoke cigarettes or cigars. Why do people smoke? Detail your thoughts on this question in an essay of about 200 words.

P. Personal, or home, computers became available on a wide scale in the 1970s. Since that time, millions of consumers have bought them. Why have many people purchased home computers? Detail your thoughts in an essay of about 200 words about the reasons a person might buy one.

Q. Millions of dollars are spent each year by people attending baseball games, football games, soccer games, basketball games, and numerous other sports. In addition, millions of dollars' worth of advertising money are spent on commercials during televised games. Why are spectator sports so popular in this society? Answer that question in an essay of about 200 words.

R. People are living longer and longer. Senior citizens are making up an increasingly larger portion of the population. Think about the lives of senior citizens in today's world. What are their needs and interests, and how do they differ from younger persons'? Answer that question in a composition of about 200 words.

S. More and more people are working at home these days. Computers, the telephone, express delivery services--these and other goods and services help make home business possible and even practical. What would be the effects of working at home? Write about the effects on the individual, on society, or on both. Detail your thoughts in a 200-word essay.

T. Unrequested mail, or "junk mail" as it is sometimes called, often greets the individual reaching into his or her mailbox. Junk mail can be advertising, charity re-

quests, or political information. Think about unrequested mail. Write about the positive aspects of such mail, the negative aspects, or both in a 200-word essay.

U. Most full-time workers these days receive two or three weeks' paid vacation as part of their job benefits. Some people like to travel on their vacation, while others enjoy staying at home. Compare and contrast spending a vacation traveling with spending one at home. Present your ideas in a composition of about 200 words. Be specific.

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